



## Illinois' Sharing A Vision Conference 2007 "Proud Moments" Sample Family Story

Joe is an expert at grand entrances. He was born with three heart defects, placed for adoption at three days, and endured open heart surgery at seven weeks of age. Unfortunately, Joe doesn't transition easily, so part of Joe retreated into a silent, "safer" world for a time.

His parents, Kenny and Terry, sought early intervention services. Joe's service coordinator arranged for Joe to receive developmental therapy, aquatic therapy, and infant massage. All the therapists worked with Kenny and Terry to show them how to encourage Joe's development at home.

When Joe was nineteen months, Terry was hired as the LIC Coordinator and Parent Liaison for three and a half years. She was able to help pave Joe's next transition by working with local providers and educators to help write a comprehensive Local Interagency Agreement. Their team also developed transition notebooks given to all families receiving early intervention services when their child turned 30 months.

Joe's transition to Pre-K was slow and steady. His first year he didn't speak in front of the other children, but his teachers were enthusiastic and consistent. His second year he made great strides both verbally and socially. Meanwhile Terry and Kenny became involved family advocates in the community. Terry was invited to join the United Way Success by 6 Vision Council to represent families with special needs children in funding decisions. Both Kenny and Terry joined the Early Head Start SpecialQuest team as the Family and Early Intervention roles respectively. They both volunteered with the Family Mentor program mentoring future teachers from the University of Illinois and serving as guest presenters.

Today Joe is an active, nine-year old third grader. He plays the violin, has played on a basketball team for the past three years, and has reached the rank of Bear in his Cub Scout program. Joe is also scoring on grade level in reading after five years of school interventions and he graduated from speech therapy services this spring.

Terry and Kenny completed seven years with SpecialQuest working with teams in Illinois and Indiana to develop strategies for increasing inclusion in their communities. Terry also served as Co-Chair of our LIC when the council almost collapsed during a change in leadership. The all-volunteer interim committee worked to write a new agreement, by-laws, create our own website, and restore our equipment loan and transition programs for families with no remaining budget.

Terry continues as a United Way Vision Council member where the priority has been on the social and emotional development of young children to prepare them for success in school. Terry and Kenny have grown with the Family Mentor program where Terry is now contracted as the Family Liaison after helping to formalize the program for family volunteers. More than sixty local families participate regularly and several families are also leaders and advocates locally.

Terry sums up their story, "Initially our providers had to take us by the hand and show us the way about almost every facet of Joe's life. We just wanted him to live, and then we wanted him to feel safe, and then to develop. Next we reached a point where we could reach out ourselves, and share our experience. Now we've been able to join teams and make that knowledge impact other families and communities. As for Joe, he just wishes his parents could keep up with him!"